

National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP)

Since 1969, the mission of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has been to collect, analyze, and produce valid and reliable information about the academic performance of students in the United States in various learning areas. In 1990, the mission of NAEP was expanded to provide state-by-state results on academic achievement. The No Child Left Behind Act directs all schools in states receiving Title I funds to participate in NAEP assessments as needed.

NAEP assessments are statistical surveys that present a representative set of questions to a representative set of students in order to build a model of student performance. NAEP results predict what the student population knows and can do on the basis of a sampling of students and questions. These results are reported as average scaled scores accompanied by an estimation of the margin of error of the survey. Small differences in scores between populations may not mean that the students in those populations are performing at different levels; NAEP reports only statistically significant differences in scores. NAEP scores are reported for states and the nation; they cannot be generated for individual districts, schools, or students. They can, however, be generated for subgroups of the population; for instance, boys and girls or urban and rural students.

NAEP is authorized by Congress and directed by the National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. The National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB), an independent body, provides policy guidelines for NAEP per 1988 federal legislation, which directed the Board to develop 'appropriate achievement goals for each subject area.' Since 1990, the Board has adopted Achievement Levels in mathematics, reading, U.S. history, geography, science, writing, and civics. This allows NAEP results to be reported in terms of percentages of students at or above levels of Basic, Proficient, and Advanced. NAGB stresses that these designations are based upon student interaction with 'challenging' material and represent eventual goals for the nation to meet.

The NAEP Newsletters give more detailed information about NAEP, the kinds of results it produces, and the ways in which this information can be useful to legislators, educators and parents in Maine.